



The IYA2009 Cornerstone Project **She is an Astronomer**

Helen Walker, STFC Rutherford Appleton Laboratory
on behalf of the She is an Astronomer Task Group

Gender equality and empowering women is one of the United Nations millennium development goals. The aim of the IYA2009 cornerstone project, She is an Astronomer, is to provide information to female professional and amateur astronomers, students, and those interested in the gender equality problem in science. An objective of the project is to build and maintain an easy-to-handle forum and database, where people can get information about the subject, ask questions and find answers.

Website: www.sheisanastronomer.org
Forum website: forum.sheisanastronomer.org

Milestones:

21 April 2009: Official launch of IYA2009 She is an Astronomer website
13 August 2009: Resolution B4 passed at IAU
1 October 2009: Forum launched

Around 30 profiles of women astronomers are currently available and we have more to load onto the website. New requests are made each month.

Around 20 profiles of female pioneers in astronomy are available. Around 25 events advertised showing the variety of activities undertaken, including conferences and workshops, exhibitions and lectures, a book launch and a play

We have several hundred people visiting the site regularly (50 – 100 visits every day), and over 2000 visits per month to the site from 91 countries. The profiles have proved popular, with some having 500 – 1000 hits per month. The forum has over 40 members, split almost equally men and women.

From the profiles of female astronomers:

We have profiles from women at all stages in their careers, in 16 different countries. We found women have a passion for astronomy, they love doing it. They will work hard and put in long hours. Women are often very good at outreach. We asked if they had been discriminated against during their career, and many said they thought that they personally had not suffered discrimination. Yet almost everyone said that women were under-represented at senior levels compared to junior levels. Generally they think things are getting better for women in astronomy. They urge us to pursue good social interactions with our colleagues, and accept their help when it is offered, to learn how the system works, join committees, get information and support, and give talks.



We asked their advice for female astronomers:

- Do what you enjoy
- Be flexible
- Keep a positive attitude
- Pick the one thing you excel at
- Don't be put off
- Break the job down into small parts
- Publish faster
- Get a mentor
- Start your family (if you want one) when you are young, energetic and flexible
- Explain to your family about your work, and why you enjoy it, and this will help them support you
- Discuss issues, keep discussing issues
- Remember the two-body problem is hard for both partners

Resolution B4 on Supporting Women in Astronomy

Proposed by: the EC WG IYA Task Group *She is an Astronomer*
Supported by: the EC WG *Women in Astronomy*

The International Astronomical Union XXVII General Assembly,

recalling

1. the UN Millennium Development Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women,
2. the IAU/UNESCO International Year of Astronomy 2009 goal 7: improve the gender-balanced representation of scientists at all levels and promote greater involvement by underrepresented minorities in scientific and engineering careers,

recognizing

1. that individual excellence in science and astronomy is independent of gender,
2. that gender equality is a fundamental principle of human rights.

considering

1. the role of the IAU Working Group for Women in Astronomy,
2. the role of the IYA2009 Cornerstone Project *She is an Astronomer*,

resolves

1. that IAU members should encourage and support the female astronomers in their communities,
2. that IAU members and National Representatives should encourage national organisations to break down barriers and ensure that men and women are given equal opportunities to pursue a successful career in astronomy at all levels and career steps.



IAU General Assembly
Voting for the resolution



Women in Astronomy
Lunch session



What have people done to celebrate women in astronomy?

- Spanish astronomers created a calendar celebrating female pioneers (now translated into English for 2010)
- Romanian astronomers handed out IYA2009 badges on 8 March to women to celebrate International Women's Day.
- Turkish astronomers visited schools to show the children that astronomers are female too.
- America held camps for girl scouts and photographers.
- Korea included a female astronomer in their 'meet an astronomer in the classroom' programme.
- India included three female astronomers in their film on astronomy to be sent to schools.
- Saudi Arabia organised lectures describing the universe, especially for women.
- Tunisia held a meeting on 7 March with lectures by women scientists.
- Germany and Australia are holding exhibitions celebrating female astronomers.
- Italy, Belgium, Ireland and the UK held meetings featuring female astronomer speakers.
- America held a workshop on inspiring young women to stay in astronomy.
- Russia held a meeting to celebrate the work of their senior female scientists.
- Australia is launching a book about Ruby Payne-Scott, a pioneering radio astronomer.

and many, many, more activities

SO WHAT! This is how you can support female astronomers

- Be aware of attitudes, be actively inclusive and challenge inappropriate comments
- Encourage/enforce, and finance, 'good practice'
- Nominate female colleagues for awards, committees, promotions, etc. Ensure nominations balanced
- Help and advise female colleagues, encourage them to apply for jobs, promotions
- Invite female astronomers to chair conference sessions, encourage women speakers

This is how your area can support female astronomers

- Enforce/encourage appropriate action (e.g. Baltimore charter recommendations, quotas, affirmative action, flexible working,)
- Funding support (two-body problem, returners, childcare)
- Gather statistics
- Ensure committees have more than one female member

